11: Johnson NN23 Sea Islanders NN23

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[For information on the size of various St. Helena plantations under White ownership, see Category 116, pp. 41-45; for information on the historical background of the planters themselves, see Category 116, pp. 103-123.]

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia



sturdy oak stumps. The front steps were three oak logs of increasing diameter that made a massive if difficult tread to the door. The house was in a large grove of oak trees and the usual plows, iron pots, and implements were scattered about the hard packed, sand yard. Jim Myers owned a good deal of land and there was a well-to-do feeling about the whole place, though it was old-fashioned and isolated in the extreme.

Uncle Jim * (Plate XXIII, XXIV) came down the log steps to greet us. His bare feet manipulated the round treads easily. He was a big man, slightly bent from rheumatism, very black with a white fringe of a beard. His eyes were rheumy with age. Around his ankles were two brass wires, which helped to take the pain out of his legs.[12b]

"Uncle Jim," we said, "tell us about the times when you were a boy."

Uncle Jim laughed in condescending good humor. "Lawd, missus, thas so long ago I ain thought bout them days in a long time and theah ain much tuh tell. Ise bawn jis twenny mile from yuh on Mr. John Tompkins' plantation and I lived roun yuh all muh life. I bin heah on Mush Bluff Ilun a long time."

We asked him if he had known any Africans when he was a young man.

"Yes'm, I sho knowd plenty of em. Theah wuz a lawg house that belonged to Mr. Hallowes wich use tuh set right ovuh theah in them woods until about ten yeahs ago. That was the house that they kep the wile Africans in. It had big ion rings in the flo. They chained them wile Africans theah till they wuz tame. They'd take em out one by one and they'd give em a stick an put em in the fiel with people wut knowd how tuh wuk and that way they lun how too. They sked to give em a hoe. It's shahp and they might frail roun with it."

* *Jim Myers, Mush Bluff Island.*



A, [See Category 142, plates following p. xxxii--EE and FF--Analyst]

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina



Sherman's famous Special Field Order No. 15 set aside for the former slaves "the islands from Charleston south [and] the abandoned rice fields along the rivers for thirty miles back from the sea." Within weeks black homesteaders were happily farming their own plots on Edisto, Wadmalaw, Johns, and James islands. By September, President Andrew Johnson had nullified Sherman's order. Many freedmen were dispossessed, but others tenaciously held on to their lands and passed them on to their descendants. Some even managed to buy more land at the end of the nineteenth century as whites again abandoned the islands after years of feeble cotton prices and a series of killer hurricanes. For the first half of the twentieth century blacks continued to be in the majority on the Sea Islands, and land values continued to be low.

For generations the Sea Islanders lived under the same hot sun, surrounded by the same sea and salt marsh, forming a barrier that isolated them from the mainland. For generations fishermen flung their nets into creeks and marshes and ocean for crabs, shrimp, and fish; and they gathered oysters and clams. These supplied both local markets and their own kitchens. For generations islanders cultivated their own little plots of land. Farmers hoed the loamy soil of the islands to produce crops of beans, peas, and cotton. First there was the planting, then the weeding, then the reaping. In the winter women sewed clothes and made quilts; the men looked for work ashore. In the spring they started the cycle over from the beginning—the planting, the weeding, the reaping.

The years passed: the young grew old and the old died. And the planting, seeding, and reaping, and the fishing, shrimping, and crabbing went on. And each spring the cycle started over again. Each year was like the year before. Each generation was like the generation before. For generations there were the same prayers and the same hopes, the same faith and the same fear, the same work and the same result. For generations there was the same old, hard legacy of slavery that robbed men and women of their honor, a legacy visited upon the children and the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren, a legacy against which honest hard work seemed useless, a legacy so old it took its place among natural phenomena like the wind and the rain.

It was not an easy life; but it was a self-sufficient life adapted to the environment, a life shaped by a rich folk culture. Cut off from the mainland, generations of Sea Islanders preserved their cultural heritage, reflecting both continuity with Africa and creativity in the New World.

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina



Hilton Head Island became known as a resort for the affluent. But similar developments have taken place on other Sea Islands. Hilton Head appears in many ways to have forecast what the future would bring. Its recent course is worth closer examination. In 1950 nearly all of the residents of Hilton Head were black; by 1980 they were outnumbered five to one by whites. According to Fraser, development has been a good thing for black natives of the islands. Resort development "caused black-owned land on Hilton Head Island to increase in value from $100 an acre near the beach or near the marshes to $50,000 or $100,000 an acre today. This flows into the pocket of the blacks who elect to sell," he says.

> I sold lots at $7,000 which today sell for $350,000. Some blacks have done the same. Some of them, smarter than I was, held onto their land, as I and developers developed our land and pushed up the values. Now they are selling. I am jubilant, positively jubilant, when a black farm family that has held the land for five generations on Hilton Head Island, land that was worth $100 when we arrived here, sells it today for $50,000. I think that's wonderful.

Fraser contends that

> it is a wise thing, for those who need the money, to elect to sell. Every black family that sells a portion of their heritage that was maintained with great struggle and great effort by their parents and grandparents and great-grandparents, and uses a part of that heritage to send a child to engineering school or to boarding school, is making an investment in the future of that family. I wish more of them would do it.

The emergence of Hilton Head Island as a playground for rich white northerners, in the opinion of Charles Fraser, has been beneficial for everyone.

But others are less sanguine. "We have witnessed some changes on Hilton Head over the last twenty-five years," suggests Emory Campbell, a native of the island, "and they have not all been good from the black perspective." Some contend that black landowners were induced to sell their land too cheaply—either through trickery or because they did not know the land's fair market value. Unquestionably some black families made money on the transactions, at least by comparison with the barterlike economy of the predevelopment decades. But even those who

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
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received fair prices made money at the cost of selling their birthright. For those who were unwilling to sell, rising land values only meant rising property taxes. Many were forced to sell because they could no longer afford to keep up the additional tax burden. "We have witnessed land being sold because the family no longer wanted to tolerate taxes on land that's doing nothing," Campbell stresses. A money economy has come to Hilton Head and the other Sea Islands. Land is being sold, he points out, "merely because people, families, need the money."*

The resort island rich give Beaufort County, which includes Hilton Head and other Sea Islands, the second highest per capita income in South Carolina. But unemployment in the county surpasses the state average with depressing regularity. And half the county's nonagricultural employees work in low-paying service jobs—as caddies, cooks, maids, maintenance workers, waiters, and waitresses. It is certainly true that this generation of islanders is better paid than the generation before them; it is not necessarily true that they are economically better off. But the islanders now live in a money economy. They must earn money to live.

While low-paying service jobs are easily available on the resort islands, higher-paying skilled occupations are rare. And those positions are not normally filled by islanders, who usually lack the requisite education. Incentives to acquire an education for positions that seem to be set aside for outsiders are lacking; incentives to take the low-paying jobs are abundant. The situation "enslaves" young people, says Emory Campbell. "They forget that a job is only a means to an end." Sea Island blacks "are not motivated to go beyond the tenth, eleventh grade because they see the immediacy of the dollar," he notes. But education does not seem to break the cycle on the Sea Islands. "The few that have gone to college, they're motivated to leave rather than to stay. They can't tolerate the situation. We just don't have the kinds of jobs here that would dignify staying. They become overwhelmed by the subservient roles that most blacks are put in here."

*I was present at the exchange between Charles E. Fraser and Emory Campbell in Charleston on December 3, 1982. The occasion was a conference entitled "Coastal Development: Past, Present, and Future," organized by the Coastal Heritage Program of the South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium with support from the South Carolina Committee for the Humanities. Their remarks are printed in the proceedings of the conference, pp. 55–56, 63. Additional comments by Campbell are taken from "We Are an Endangered Species: An Interview with Emory Campbell," by Vernie Singleton, *Southern Exposure* 10 (May–June, 1982): 37–39.

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
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there were 181 construction workers on their island, and 38 or 40 percent of those were black, although all did not come from the immediate area. In the area of operations employment, 111 of 250 total workers on Kiawah or 44 percent were from Johns, Wadmalaw, or Yonges in April of 1976. These are startup operations, but the same trends can be observed on Hilton Head Island. At the Hilton Head Company, 37 of the 103 workers are minorities, as compared to 40 percent local residents as employees for the local Holiday Inn.[19]

Despite these improved job opportunities, the Sea Islands remain among areas listed by the BCD Council of Governments as economically distressed. For example, Edisto Island had a 1970 median family income of about $2,500. Approximately 60 percent of Edisto's population reported incomes below the 1970 poverty level. Of the 2,024 residents on Wadmalaw Island, 1,053 had incomes below the poverty level; the median income for Wadmalaw was $4,700.[20]

The high poverty levels reported for the Sea Island areas are related not so much to the employment opportunities in the area as to a lack of skills that prevents the islanders from applying for well-paid jobs. In 1980 more than 50 percent of the respondents in one study undertaken on Wadmalaw, Johns, and James islands had less than a ninth-grade education (though there are many permanent inhabitants of the Sea Islands who hold university and professional degrees). Members of the labor force in 1980 were employed as unskilled private household workers, maintenance workers, clerks, food service workers, unskilled hospital personnel, and the like.[21]

As noted, the agricultural patterns have changed over the years. When the Indians had been driven out of the islands, the land was owned partly by tenant black farmers and partly by white planters whose acreage was worked by African slaves. Immediately after the Civil War, only blacks could buy land in the region. Thousands of acres had been left by planters when they fled from the Union troops. They could not buy back the land because they could not pay the federal direct tax imposed by the Washington government, and even if they had been financially able to pay the taxes, they could not have made their way through the Union camps to do so. The federal government and various societies in the North wishing to befriend the blacks wanted the island property to go to the free slaves. To meet this inten-

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
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tion, General W. T. Sherman issued his famous Field Order No. 15: "The islands from Charleston, south, the abandoned rice fields along the rivers for thirty miles back from the sea, and the country bordering the St. Johns river, Florida, are reserved and set apart for the settlement of the Negroes."[22]

From the earliest days the islanders tended to be self-sufficient agriculturally. The landowners—black or white—harvested mainly indigo and long-staple cotton, commodities that thrived well on the rich island soil. Rice, by 1724 one of the most profitable staple commodities in the mainland coastal areas,[23] was not grown to any great extent on the islands.[24]

Peter Wood writes convincingly that the West Africans were primarily responsible for the economic success of the flourishing rice crops in the Carolina territory. The cultivation, growth, and processing of rice is an old tradition in West Africa. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries rice was grown in most West African areas, and especially heavily near the Gambia River. In the Congo-Angola region, a white explorer once noted that rice was so plentiful that it brought no price at all. During this period West Africans actually sold rice to the slave traders to stock their ships.[25]

Unlike the Europeans, then, who knew little about rice, the transplanted Africans were widely familiar with its cultivation. In fact, rice was so important a part of African culture that its growth and harvest were celebrated each year, just as the growing of yams was celebrated in "yam festivals."[26] In West Africa today there is still a kind of symbolism associated with rice and yams: they are much more than just food to be consumed.[27] Rice continues to be a primary food in both West Africa and the Sea Islands, and its preparation and offering tend to be expressions of fine taste and "good eating."[28]

Until recent years the primary Sea Island commodity was long-staple cotton, a crop that thrives only in light, sandy, saltwater lands. Because of its fine silky texture, it brought excellent prices on the world market, and it was grown along the Atlantic coast from the Santee River of South Carolina to the Florida Everglades.[29] The rapid expansion of cotton production on the islands, as elsewhere, was a major factor in the great demand for West African slaves to work the fields. Perhaps because cotton was a crop new to the slaves, or because the growth and harvest of an inedible crop did not offer the familiar gratification associated with rice, or merely because of the connection

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
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439 439 twenty-dollar bill from his wallet, tore it in half, gave her half of it, and told her he would give her the other half when she finished weaving the coasters. He left thinking that he had indeed made a bargain. Feeling somewhat dismayed by the whole procedure, I asked her how she could afford to make the coasters for only twenty dollars if it took her a week to weave them. She smiled slyly and said she could make them in a matter of hours.

## Social Structure

177 156 The ways of the Sea Islanders, as I have said, offer valuable insights into an Afro-American culture which has had relatively little contact with the customs of the white majority until very recent years. According to one group of researchers, the unusual circumstances which created the culture also "created a unique psyche for Blacks in the Sea Island area":

> We have seen their consequences in a number of ways in our research. We constantly encounter elderly Blacks whose knowledge of and acquaintance with whites is very limited. They have not had to interact with whites or the majority culture in the same way as Blacks in the other parts of this country. Many of them have a fierce kind of pride and a lack of fear which is seldom seen in other places. The self-doubt and sense of inadequacy and inferiority often cited as characteristic of the Black psyche are not found to the same degrees in our Sea Island research.[42]

596 Their preserved traditions, too, set the Sea Islanders apart from other Americans, black or white. The extended family is the norm in the Sea Islands. Most islands are sectioned off into family communities, where all members of one family, their close relatives, and people remotely related live or have a right to live as long as they can satisfactorily show evidence of kinship. Land is not normally sold to family members but is passed on through an unwritten contract called "heir's land"; if land *is* sold to relatives, the charge is only one dollar to fulfill "legal tenets of the state."[43]

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621 602 (423) Land ownership is closely aligned with kinship, and kinship is the primary social factor necessary for acceptance into island communities. One must be born, reared, and have a known family history on a

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
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# Appendix 4

# The Land Question

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As the islanders often put it, "Everything change up now." One of the major areas of change in recent years has been in the use and ownership of land in the islands. "Primarily," comments Ed Brown, an attorney practicing in Charleston County who grew up on Wadmalaw,

> the land is changing hands because history has created a division between those people who own the land and those people who want to buy land. And if a developer comes in here with forty thousand dollars for ten acres of land, which might appear at first blush to be a lot of money, the landowner is perhaps inclined to take the forty thousand dollars and part with title to the land. That happens. I don't know that that is a bad thing. I think that what it does do is it creates a problem for the person who has sold the land, because if you are not sophisticated in terms of handling the forty thousand dollars, then you lose it rather quickly, whereas the land would be there forever.[1]

The relationship of black people to land in general has considerable significance. Various studies and reports trace the origins of many of the current domestic ills of the United States to the surge of southern blacks into urban areas as the rural southern economy found that under existing social arrangements, it could no longer employ large numbers of small farmers, sharecroppers, tenants, and unskilled farm laborers. In the 1960s alone, more than 1.3 million blacks left the South, and during the previous decade the number was even greater.[2]

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The population that remains behind on the islands is having to adjust to the incoming population of resort residents, as well as resort development for tourism. Developers have not been responsive to local needs. Seabrook was the first of the islands to be opened up as a resort.

[p. 165]

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
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423 177 The original owner of the island, one of the major church denominations, sold it to a group of developers, who in turn sold it to a second group, from New York. No input from the community was requested, and a great deal of hostility resulted. When developers came to Kiawah to create a much larger resort area, they expressed readiness to meet community needs and asked for a list. The time available to come up with this list was brief, but island leaders working with Bill Jenkins, a long-time activist in land issues, did manage to set out six or seven mostly minor suggestions. "We did it in good faith," notes Jenkins. "I think we were more in good faith than they were, because some of those things we are still trying to get."

"I remember as a little boy," says Ed Brown, "that you could purchase perhaps an acre of land for two hundred dollars. Today that's just unheard of. So the very basic thing that gives the islands their wealth, namely, the property, is increasing in value, but we need to develop a methodology by which that can be properly managed and the profits therefrom, if there are to be profits, channeled back into the islands for their development." He adds, "I see good things. I'm an eternal optimist. I think that the future will prove to be very fruitful . . . if we can learn from the mistakes." Yet he does not deny that there have been mistakes, for instance, the absence of "a working rapport between the people who operate these resorts and the people who in fact live on these islands, and who have lived there for quite some time."

423 311 177 Land is being taken out of production. Acreage once used to grow food is now restricted and controlled by high taxes and county regulations implemented in response to development. Small livestock farmers located next to tracts under new ownership may be pressured to sell out if their activities seem incompatible with the projects of the developers. Lands are lost, too, when people unused to record keeping lose tax receipts and forget to pay yearly bills, or when land descends to heirs who have moved away and have no interest in it.

423 177 Bill Jenkins has provided an illustration of what can happen when developers are more interested in a piece of property than its legal owners:

> There's seventy-nine acres of land down at Johns Island airport. . . . Developers . . . did some research and found out who were some of the people who were involved in that property. [One of

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
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•423 177 them] found a wino in New York City and just walked up to him and said, "I heard you own some property on Johns Island." The guy thought he was kidding because he had never been to Johns Island. So he just started laughing. [The developer] said, "I'm serious. You get a witness and come with me and I will give you five hundred dollars for what you own." So this guy, you know, he thought Santa Claus. So he got one of his friends and they went downtown, and he had everything probated, signed it off, and the people came down here and created all kinds of problems for the rest of the family. Eventually, they had to end up selling that land . . . because with this property, when the families are so large, most of the time you can't even get all of the family together, so they could agree who's going to get the swampland, who's going to get the house, who's going to get the waterfront. . . . But the court could sell all of the land and divide the money equally. And so, when this land developer bought this land . . . , he came down here and he wanted his portion. . . . He is now one of the heirs. But [he and the family] cannot agree on which piece. . . . Then he goes back to the court and says, "We can't reach an agreement." And if you can't reach an agreement, then the court will come in and put it up for sale.

423 871 Obviously, the question of land retention is directly tied to the education of the landowners about the legal responsibilities involved. For more than twenty years, groups have been operating in that interest throughout the Sea Islands and the rural South. In 1970 Professor Robert Browne, who was then studying the loss of black land in the South for the Black Economic Research Center in New York (he is now at Howard University), was able to obtain a million dollars from a private donor to organize the National Emergency Land Fund. The fund has focused on educating black landowners about their responsibilities, helping them express themselves, putting land into production, and resisting aggressive development.

871 [873] The fund has worked in conjunction with the Penn Center on St. Helena Island, South Carolina, one of the oldest institutions established for the education of blacks in the United States. Penn School began by teaching newly freed slaves and continued as the only high school for black children on the island. In 1948 the bulk of its programs were transferred to the county public school system, but most of

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
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its community outreach activities were continued. The Penn Center, currently directed by Emory Campbell, acts as an information and referral source, provides such social services as visiting families to help them select food crops, and educates in matters including use of land and landownership.

Bill Jenkins was working for Penn Community Services in the early 1970s when he helped put together a program called Black Land Services, in response to a number of requests for help in retaining ownership of land. He is now active in the South Carolina Land Owners' Association, an offshoot of the National Association of Land Owners, which presently operates only in Mississippi and Alabama. Faced with serious cutbacks in funding and manpower, the South Carolina Land Owners' Association is not able to be as active as it once was, but Jenkins and co-worker Joe McDermott continue their educational activities in the islands on a reduced scale.

The desire of the dominant society to reclaim the Sea Islands, though shortsighted, nonetheless seems likely to prevail. As Ed Brown puts it, "The industry is there." The displacement that has already occurred will have long-term repercussions. "The social consequences of the pressures from development on the Sea Islands will be seen another five to ten to fifteen years," notes Emory Campbell. "It's subtle now but we at Penn Center see it as a very serious problem—serious today as it is going to be serious in another ten to fifteen years."

The islanders' ineffectiveness in resisting the often reckless advances of developers must be laid at the door of the very insularity that for so long protected their culture. Adherence to traditional ways has by and large robbed them of the ability to respond to the intrusion with equal and opposite force. The price they are paying now is one more legacy of slavery.

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
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counter those of outside interests. The County Commission accepted this new plan for limited and controlled development in early 1988, but the island residents know they must be constantly vigilant to ensure its success.

But another kind of development is here as well. In the 1970s a comprehensive community organization was put in place to address health needs on the island. Beginning first with a small clinic as part of Rural Missions, Inc., a local community improvement association, it grew to include environmental health, housing for the elderly, nutrition, and programs for substance abuse, as well as the devel ,ment of a full-scale medical clinic and a nursing home. The Sea Island Comprehensive Health Care Corporation is a crucial factor in the present and the future of five sea islands—Johns, James, Wadmalaw, Edisto, and Yonges—and in many ways is a direct outgrowth of the story Esau Jenkins recounts earlier in this book. The Health Care Corporation is also a landowner, but it has utilized the land for the benefit of the indigenous community rather than for wealthy newcomers. It's a model worth looking at.

One of the greatest pressures on Johns Island is land ownership. As the chain of sea islands becomes increasingly valuable for tourist development, the patterns of passing property down through families and the need to know about land and tax laws become crucial to the survival of the community. People on Johns Island are now well aware of the value of their land and are coming together to plan their futures. Further down the coast, on St. Helena Island, Penn Community Center has sponsored a program to guard against the loss of land by blacks. The center's director, Emory Campbell, having seen his home community of Hilton Head undergo drastic change in the 1950s, is an eloquent speaker for the protection of the land for traditional communities. He and a coworker, Joe McDomick, have come to Johns Island to participate in workshops on land issues.

As in 1965, education is still a major concern on Johns Island. Esau told of the struggle to get a black high school on the island. In the late 1960s

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
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power, see? That's when the farming situation changed; they built these roads, and they began to produce more food for defense. White farmers. Negroes have come to tractors in later years, after they got on their feet. But they have small farms. No comparison with white farms.

There weren't too many white people here then, but they owned most of the land and they had the farms. The Negroes were little farmers. Many of them had their own lots, but weren't able to build a house. World War II came, they were able to make some money and they moved off the farms and built little homes.

More people work in the city now. Nothing here to do except a few farmers to work for. Few women have employment on the farm. They work in the city as domestics. You find a few on the farm here and there. In the springtime they take trucks around and pick up the hands for the day.

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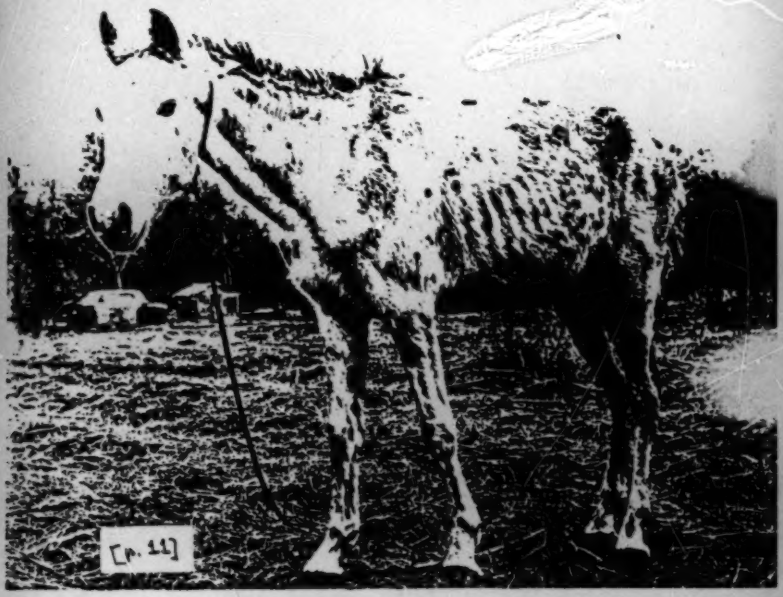

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

*Mr. Abraham Jenkins*

## GOD AIN'T MAKING NO MORE LAND

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Land on these islands got to be so valuable because of the development projects on Kiawah and Seabrook. At one time you could get an acre of land for less than fifty dollars. Now land costs a lot more. It's almost impossible to buy land now. We got people out here now that come to buy with cash money. This is a way of enticing and influencing people because people have spent all their lives trying to make some money and here this guy walks up to you with rolls of thousand dollar bills circled by hundreds and five hundreds and starts talking. Many of these people just want to take the money and I can understand it. But you have to let them know that God ain't making no more land, and if you got any, you better hold onto it and try to work some other type of arrangement like long-term leasing. Sometimes you can be land-rich, but you can lose it all.

Black land is a threat to further development. It's slowing things down. I'll give you an example of how these developers operate. There is a black family that used to own about seventy-nine acres of land on Johns Island. The land developers were out there like buzzards trying to find an heir to that property that would not have any interest in the property. In this particular case the heir was somebody in New York and the developer said, "I will give

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
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you X amount of dollars for what you own on Johns Island." He said, "Man, what are you talking about? I have never been to Johns Island." The developer said, "Yes, but you own something down there." The developer looked like Santa Claus to him and he just went on and took the money.

The developer took the signed agreement into probate court and started suing for partition. They couldn't agree on how to divide the seventy-nine acres. The court said since the relatives could not agree who was going to get the swamp, who was going to get the waterfront, who was going to get whatever, then the whole property should be sold and the money divided.

The developer wanted the whole thing anyway. When he signed the piece of paper for whatever he owned, he became a member of the family. He would not agree to any settlement. When they had the partition sale, he had someone come and outbid the rest of the family.

We're planning quarterly land workshops now so that people can learn more about how to protect their land.

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
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Johns Island

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*Ms. Elaine Jenkins*

## WE CAN HAVE SOME SAY AS TO WHAT'S GOING TO BE DEVELOPED

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We've been meeting and talking about heirs' property and how to get it cut up now so that folk don't lose all of it. There are so many people involved, all it takes is for one person to sell out. Once that one sells and some stranger gets in, he can force a partition suit, and they may end up losing a whole tract of land. What we've been trying to do is tell them how to get it partitioned among family members. So if one wants to sell, fine. He will just have that acre or so. But not the whole tract going out from under them.

[651] [428] I'm talking to them about taxes and the importance of paying those taxes. And we're notifying people when we see their land up for sale for nonpayment of taxes. I'm talking to them about making wills. If you don't make a will that's where all these heirs come in. It's just so much to keep up with.

Being a lawyer is something I always knew I wanted to do, from the time I can remember. And my intentions were always to return to Charleston and Johns Island. This is where I wanted to be. I love this place.

We can have some say as to what's going to be developed—what's going to go up and where it's going to go up. That's still open to us.

skilled in bad weather. The best of the inhabitable land has been owned by two or three black families since the last half of the nineteenth century. Most of the present inhabitants are related to each other, at least distantly. A few white sportsmen have established hunting lodges on the uninhabited portions of the island, and a land development company has been draining some marshes in order to build waterfront resort homes. At the time of the present study, however, all people present on a daily basis on the island were members of the black community. The island is well-known to residents of Georgetown County, even though few have visited it. It is generally considered to be a mysterious and somewhat backward place. High school students tell of being teased about coming from the island and being looked upon as somehow different and perhaps unsophisticated. Teachers in mainland schools note the close friendships between island children and the in-group humor characteristic of them; some teachers consider their language distinctive, but others do not.

Historically, the economy of the island was based upon rice. Once at least nine major plantations flourished there, worked and probably managed largely by black labor. Few of the white owners made permanent homes on the island, probably no more than two families at any one time. The majority of the land remains in the hands of white individual owners or corporations, but they remain absentee owners. Long after rice had ceased to be a major factor in the rest

193 369 urban ghetto which was in sight of City Hall in the upstate community had traveled much less extensively than had the children in the isolated rural community of Georgetown County. The rural children, many of whom had lived for extended periods in northern cities, used far more creole forms in their speech than did urban children in the upcountry. Indications were that these rural children might command a wider range of language structures along the creole continuum than those in the more urban area. In asking about mobility patterns among adult speakers in the island community, I discovered that many, if not most, older men had lived off the island for extended periods of their lives and that most women had commuted off the island on a daily basis to mainland jobs for the past three or four decades. In the mainland community, similar patterns prevailed for men, while women were much less mobile and generally worked near or in their own immediate community. Furthermore, educational patterns for women were different in the two communities to a striking degree. Many mainland women in the older generation were illiterate, while some island women had gone away to college. Land ownership patterns on the island provided a measure of economic security which enabled islanders to help educate their daughters. For these educated island-women, geographic mobility was associated with social mobility as well. None who had college educations now lived on the island; some were married to mainland businessmen and

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362 is 4.67. Edisto has 239 Black occupied units.

Precise data on the secondary characteristics of Black Sea Island housing units were unavailable. The following figures are based on a total of 3,685 rural units and 613 rural farm units in Charleston County and can consequently serve only as a general indicator for the secondary characteristics of Black Sea Island households. Only 1,547 of the rural units have all plumbing facilities. One thousand three hundred and eighty-six of these units are renter occupied. The overwhelming majority (3,381) of the units have no inside water facilities. One thousand six hundred and forty-five of the units were constructed before 1939 and 1,384 between 1940 and 1949. One thousand three hundred and twenty-seven of the units are valued at less than $5,000. The median size of rural units is 4.05 rooms.

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Of a total of 18,952 Black occupied units in the county, 8,142 units are owner occupied. Of the owner occupied units 2,988 were occupied in 1949 or earlier and 1,069 of the renters have a similar residency pattern. The median size of all Black occupied units is 4.7 rooms. The median size of owner occupied units is 5.7 and 4.0 for renter units. The median monthly rent paid is $41.00 for units without and $48.00 for units with all plumbing facilities.

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ever that some scheme of management be hit upon which would make the plantations pay for themselves, for Congress showed no disposition to help the experiment along by an appropriation and the cotton fund, the amount realized from the sale of the crop of 1861, was getting low.[80]

Early in November General Saxton called a meeting of superintendents to consider plans for the coming year. Edward S. Philbrick, superintendent of Coffin's Point plantation, advocated an almost complete overthrow of the old plantation system. He would divide the plantations among the people, allotting the Negro families as much land as they could cultivate, paying them upon the basis of what they raised. This plan the government finally accepted for the crop of 1863. The plantations still under Government supervision were divided into plots and rented without charge to the plantation families, the land being apportioned at the rate of two acres for every working hand and five-sixteenths of an acre for every child. If they refused to raise cotton, they were compelled to pay a rent of not more than $2 a month. In addition, the Government supplied the implements and seeds and paid 25 cents for a day's work, usually the amount of work performed by task under the master.[81]

Saxton now divided the territory under his supervision into three areas and appointed a general superintendent over each. The local superintendents in charge of plantations were answerable to their respective general superintendents.[82]

[80] *Letters from Port Royal*, p. 115.

[81] Pierce, *Addresses and Papers*, p. 116. Pierce had approved of this plan in his "Second Report," p. 319.

[82] *Official Records*, ser. III, vol. IV, serial 125, pp. 1023, 1024.

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In February, 1863, the Government began to sell the conquered territory at auction for the Federal direct tax levied by the Act of August 5, 1861. Some of the land was sold to private individuals and some was bid in by the United States for naval and military purposes and some for "school farms," the profits from which were to be applied to the education of the Negro, now declared free by Act of Congress, July 17, 1862,[33] and by virtue of the President's proclamation of January 1, 1863.

In 1864 all Government plantations were leased to white superintendents. After rejecting in 1862 the plan of the cotton agents to rent out the plantations, the Government had come two years later to accept it. But General Saxton, still the director of "freedmen's affairs," did not propose to stand by and see the Negro abused. In April, 1864, he issued a circular requiring all superintendents of plantations, whether of government or private ownership, to file a signed statement with their general superintendents setting forth the terms of the agreement existing between themselves and their laborers. The general superintendent was then ordered to visit the plantation, explain the contract to the Negroes, and affix to it the names of all who agreed to the terms. Any laborer who objected to them was warned to leave his employer or to stay at his own risk.[34]

In many instances, the general superintendents encouraged the teachers to lease the school farms and permitted them to do so free of rent, provided that they live on the plantation and teach the children of their "dis-

[33] *U. S. Statutes at Large*, XII, 591. Congress declared free all slaves of rebel masters in places occupied by the United States forces, or escaping thereto.

[34] *Letters from Port Royal*, p. 262n.

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one of Boston, in the project, and on March 9 bought 6,795 acres, valued by the commissioners at $24,120, for about $7,000, eleven plantations including Coffin's Point, Fripp's Point, Cherry Hill, Pine Grove, John Fripp's Big House, Mulberry Hill, Corner Farm, two plantations on Ladies Island, and Morgan Island.[58] For the most part he employed to help him in the experiment the superintendents and teachers who were already on the plantations. After conducting the enterprise for two years with many vexations and losses, he began to sell the land in 1865, some plantations to white men from the North, others in small tracts to Negroes. He got from $5 to $10 an acre for land for which he had paid a little more than a dollar.[59]

The land bid in for the United States had been bought with the idea of providing for military and naval purposes and with the hope eventually of placing land within the reach of the Negro. The President's instructions to the tax commissioners of September 16, 1863, outlined a plan whereby this hope might be realized. After listing the land to be reserved for military and naval purposes, providing for land to be sold to men serving in the army, navy, or marine corps, and setting apart thirty-six school farms of 160 acres each, he directed that all parts of certain tracts not otherwise appropriated be surveyed into twenty-acre plots and sold to "heads of families of the African race, only one to each, preferring such as by their good conduct, meritorious services, or exemplary character, will be examples of moral propriety and industry to

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[58] MS, South Carolina Maps, 366. But see *Letters from Port Royal*, p. 172.
[59] *Letters from Port Royal*, pp. 277, 296, 315, 324, 326.

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those of the same race, for the charitable purpose of providing homes for such heads of families."[80] The land thus reserved was to be sold to Negroes at not less than $1.25 an acre. All other land the President authorized to be sold in parcels of not more than 320 acres at public auction.

On December 10, 1863, the sales to heads of families began and were continued at irregular intervals until 1870 when the board was dissolved. In 1863 General Saxton issued a circular to the freedmen of South Carolina, authorizing them to locate on the land set aside for them. They were then directed to deposit with the commissioners on days announced for this purpose the full purchase price of the land together with a description of it and the date of preemption.[81] Buildings on any of these tracts were to be sold at one-third the appraised value. By June, 1865, there had been 347 purchases made on St. Helena Island. Of this number, 243 bought ten acres, 166 paying $1.50 an acre and 72 paying $1.25, the other five paying from $2 to $6.50 an acre. The highest price paid for any tract was $350 for twenty acres. In only two instances did purchasers buy land as low as $1 an acre.[82]

[80] "Instructions Issued By President Lincoln . . . to the United States Direct Tax Commissioners for South Carolina," *Compilation of Direct Tax Laws*, pp. 61-66; *House Ex. Doc.* no. 146, 40th Cong., 2d sess. Parts of the following plantations on St. Helena Island were set aside: The Oaks, Oakland, Indian Hill, Eddings' Point, Tom Fripp's plantation, Cedar Grove, Hamilton Fripp's plantation, the McTureous lands, Hope plantation, Woodstock, Frogmore, Frank Pritchard's plantation, Jane Pritchard's plantation, Scott plantation, Oliver Fripp's plantation, Wallace plantation, and the Fendon tract.

[81] The right of preemption was later abandoned. See Saxton's report to Stanton, *Official Records*, ser. III, vol. IV, serial no. 125, pp. 1022-1031.

[82] See MSS, Heads of Families Certificate Books. In Archives of U. S. Treasury Department.

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General Sherman, after having finally reached the sea in his famous march thereto, as a result of a conference with Secretary Stanton, issued Special Field Order No. 15 on January 16, 1865, setting aside "the islands from Charleston, south, the abandoned rice fields along the rivers for thirty miles back from the sea, and the country bordering the St. John's River, Florida," for the freedmen, and especially reserved the islands for "the sole and exclusive management" of the Negroes.[63] The order, however, specifically exempted from its operation those whites who had bought land at the tax sales. Saxton, who was authorized to put the terms of the order in operation, at once began to settle Negroes on the land. No Negro, however, acquired the title to the land by virtue of General Sherman's order. Later, Congress, for the relief of those who had been settled on abandoned plantations, ordered, in an amendment to the Freedman's Bureau Act of July 16, 1866, a sale of most of the public land at $1.50 an acre to "such persons and to such only as have acquired and are now occupying lands under and agreeably to the provisions of General Sherman's special field order." This same act called for a sale of the school farms in St. Helena's Parish at $10 an acre.[64]

Before the Government had sold all the land which it had taken over in 1863 for the non-payment of taxes, the possession of it had become an irksome problem, grievous alike to the Government and to the people who were trying to rehabilitate the region after the War. Money was scarce and the buyers few. It was not until 1876 that the Government finally disposed of all the land.

[63] *House Ex. Doc.* no. 11, 39th Cong., 1st sess.
[64] *U. S. Statutes at Large*, XIV, chap. CC, secs. 6-12.

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## THE NEGRO AS A LANDOWNER

175 •423 The opportunity to buy land of their own created the first real excitement among the Negroes which had occurred since "gun shoot." They were all astir trying to stake out claims and then trying to get their claims considered by the commissioners. They had the money which 175 423 434 they had earned as plantation hands for the Government and as laborers at the camps with which to meet the purchase price. Besides, many of them had sold fish, chickens, and garden truck to the superintendents and the soldiers. W. C. Gannett estimated in 1863 that a driver on one of the St. Helena plantations had made four or five hundred dollars since the Federal occupation. "He is all ready to buy land," he wrote, "and I expect to see him in ten years a tolerably rich man."[87] Many Negroes who did [476] not have sufficient funds to buy tracts of the size they desired organized clubs and bought land in this way.[88]

175 423 Whenever it was possible the Negroes chose to purchase land on the plantations where they had been born. In staking out their claims they invariably moved their cabin in the "street" to the new plots of land, and started life as landholding citizens on the very ground which they had cultivated as slaves. Thus the transition from slavery to freedom scarcely interrupted the daily routine. Now they had freedom of movement, but with it [434] had come the responsibility of earning their own living, [241] and the only method open to most of them was the cultivation of their little tracts after the manner learned in slavery.

[87] *Letters from Port Royal*, p. 37n.
[88] *Beaufort Republican*, May 30, 1872.

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CHAPTER IX

# THE AFTERMATH

## A ST. HELENA PICTURE IN 1865

IT WAS SUNDAY in May, 1865. The sandy road, covered in the low places with a top dressing of oyster shells, led off among the cotton fields down the Island. On either side were sagging wire fences, reminders of plantation boundaries before the war, the wire sometimes propped by drooping posts, at other times deeply embedded in the trunks of fine trees forming magnificent avenues.

Here and there were small frame houses, with narrow porches and four or five rooms, the residences of former overseers. Rude pine-log cabins, newly built, and clapboarded shanties leaning crazily in the mid-day sun dotted the fields. Gardens of growing vegetables separated the cabins from the rows of cotton that extended away as far as one could see. Little stakes occasionally marked off private holdings, sometimes the only boundaries in fields of a hundred or more acres of cotton. Just beyond was a large tract lying fallow, covered with a luxurious growth of cassina and dewberries, or perhaps a young forest of pines had sprung up among cotton furrows which, though idle for many years, were yet plainly visible.

The cotton was small, for it was not more than four weeks out of the ground, but the corn was knee high. Neat ridges were already piled up about the cabins waiting until the young sweet potato slips were large enough for transplanting. Here the fields were beautifully clean, carefully hilled up with the hoe by the women and old

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an estate which had numbered 1,284 acres.[5] All but Edgar W. Fripp after a few years sold their land in small plots to Negroes. Fripp, a minor at the time of the war, retained his holding until recently when he sold it for a hunting preserve.

The prosperity in which the freedmen of Port Royal found themselves in 1865 was largely delusive, for it was the prosperity of war times. The presence of the soldiers afforded a ready market for whatever the Negroes had to sell; the presence of the camps offered ready work at high wages for those who wanted it; the fostering care of the Freedman's Bureau kept them from starvation in time of necessity. The magnificent bounty of $300 which "Government" offered all volunteers led many a St. Helena youth to enter the army. The bounty money he used to buy ten acres of land and the equipment for his "plantation," keeping out $100, perhaps, to "pleasure" himself. Whenever it was possible to peddle chickens, fish, and garden truck to the soldiers, the freedmen never raised cotton, for they got high prices for their wares.

All who had bought land by the close of the war, had for the most part erected their own cabins and equipped them with a few pieces of cheap furniture, beds, tables, and chairs. They now must have plates and knives and forks. They must have both a work suit and a "Sunday best," and the cloth must be of the finest. They must have carts, buggies, and horses. Indeed, their purchases at the trade stores were so liberal that the military authorities several times interfered to prevent what they consid-

[5] Direct Tax Case, No. 17, 498 filed in Court of Claims March 25, 1892; No. 17, 366 filed Feb. 6, 1892.

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him, ere he will gain all his rights; but I would rather, for his own sake, see him oppressed for generations, than be spoiled and petted as he has been here. He would come out of the struggle more manly and self-reliant.[7]

Philbrick had been opposed from the first to giving the Negroes anything except in payment for services actually performed. He observed in the autumn of 1862 that they were more economical of food than they had been in the spring when they thought that the Government would ration them as their masters had done. Philbrick would have followed the same rule in regard to tools, paying them wages enough to enable each person to buy his own hoe and spade. The superintendents were likewise opposed to the Government policy of selling land to the Negroes at a special price. After the sales had been effected and the Negroes had been in possession of their holdings for more than a year, Philbrick was of the opinion that "no race of men on God's earth ever acquired the right to the soil" with so little effort as the Negroes on St. Helena. He thought that they would have been better off had they paid the market value of the land, "because they would use the land for which they had paid full price more economically, would be likely to get more out of it, and would be taught a feeling of independence more readily than by being made the recipients of charity."[8]

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Philbrick himself had acquired his land at a lower price than the Negroes had paid, but he overlooked this fact in evaluating the Government's policy toward the Negro because he was honestly attempting to put into

[7] MS in Arthur Sumner Papers. Feb., 1865.
[8] *Letters from Port Royal*, pp. 276, 277.

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nah, who were trying to carry on their business as before the war, had but little money with which to do so, but they lent and borrowed to the limit, taking great risks and demanding high percentages. Northern capital in many instances came to the rescue both of factors and planters. But the series of crop failures coupled with the drop in the price of cotton and the continued high price of provisions brought disaster to all. Frequently planters deeded large tracts of land, sometimes all except a hundred or more acres of what was once a large plantation, to northern firms for the cancellation of debts. James Gregorie, of Greenwood plantation, located not far from Beaufort, after making a tragic struggle for ten years to carry on his planting, finally gave up his property to a Philadelphia firm which he had involved heavily in debt.[14] In many instances these northern houses, after holding the plantations for a few years, began to sell them in small plots to Negroes, thus giving rise to the numerous communities of Negro landowners, aside from those in old Beaufort District, which now dot the coast of South Carolina and Georgia.

The Government offered relief by issuing rations to the freedmen, now hard-pressed. Later when the Freedmen's Bureau had been abandoned and the Negroes could no longer turn to the Government for aid, Miss Towne came forward with provisions, supplied sometimes from her own funds, at other times by gifts from the North which she had solicited. In 1876 when there was considerable distress, the whites of Beaufort organized a society to obtain funds with which to issue provisions.

[14] See MSS in Gregorie Papers.

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enough corn to supply themselves with hominy and grits and their chickens, pig, and ox with a scanty meal a day pieced out with marsh grass and with moss which they pulled down from the live oaks with long poles. When they sold their cotton in the late fall, they had a little money. With this they paid their taxes and bought clothes, and during the rest of the year lived without money.

Sometimes their crops did not yield enough to meet the taxes. In May, 1872, the *Beaufort Republican* advertised 318 farms on St. Helena and Ladies islands for sale, the taxes on which had not been paid for three years.[16] The size of their holdings was not only reduced by sale for taxes but also by division among heirs, so that it was not long until the condition which Philbrick had predicted in 1864 actually occurred. He had thought of dividing his plantations among the Negroes by selling them life-leases in order to protect them in the ownership of their land. In explaining his unwillingness to sell the land in fee simple he wrote to his superintendent:

> This occurred to me as a means of avoiding the terrible and disastrous confusion which it will be next to impossible to avoid after a term of years, if the fee should be conveyed, when the purchasers die and sell or change land as they will to a certain extent in time. It is bad enough to trace a title and find out whether it is good for anything here in systematic New England, . . . but it makes my orderly bones ache to think of a time when, after some men now purchasing land shall die, leaving two or three sets of children, some born under wedlock and some not, some not their own but their wives' children, some even of questionable parentage, and some who were never heard of before, all claiming a slice of the

[16] *Beaufort Republican*, May 29, 1872.

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deceased man's land, and of course claiming the best. Suppose it was bounded by a 'stake and stone' as of old here, minus the stones which are absent; suppose some of the claimants think best to set up new stakes where one has gone to decay, and suppose, as is more likely, their neighbor thinks the new stake encroaches on him and pulls it up entirely, stamping on the hole and putting it in according to his own ideas, etc., etc., ad infinitum. Now, as you must admit that all this is likely to occur, and worse too, would such a state of things tend to bring about a healthy and rapid development?[16]

As Philbrick predicted, controversies over land and the rightful title thereto retarded the progress of the St. Helena people by reducing the acreage and profits of farming and by arousing disputes which sent some of the best blood from the Island.

Hard times drove many of the young men from the Island and led many a mother and father to permit even their young children to be sent away as servants so that they might have a better opportunity of making a living than farming on St. Helena afforded. Early in 1867 Miss Towne wrote to a relative in Philadelphia, "I wish you could have the comfort the Heacocks have in the little darkies they sent North. The two young girls are large and strong and able to do pretty much all the work of the house. They work without wages till they are of age, but are to have the privilege of schooling. The experiment has been a perfect success, and every few weeks some one sends to them for another girl or boy, and all have given satisfaction so far."[17] Most of the boys and girls who left the Island in their teens went only as far as the nearby

[16] *Letters from Port Royal*, pp. 273, 274.
[17] *Letters and Diary*, p. 182.

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had gone away with her and "married." She had begged him to return and so he did, but after a few months he had gone off again to live with the other wife down the road a few tasks away. He was in the meeting-house yonder, a prayin' now.[24]

After Reconstruction, one heard fewer of such stories on St. Helena, for the church officials attempted to discipline all offenders. Although there were fewer cases of desertion, illegitimacy was none the less frequent despite the "churching." The significant change in family life was the elevated status of the husband. In attempting to stabilize family life, the superintendents and teachers had appealed to the man as the head of the family and had urged him to assume his rightful responsibilities. Black men who had been accustomed to the dominance of women during slavery came now to warn their wives to keep their places. The land which they bought from the Government was in their own names and they came to look upon the house as theirs, not that of their wives as in slavery days.

Freedom brought few changes in the religious life of the people. They still clung to their plantation praise houses, but instead of one praise house to a plantation they occasionally had as many as two or three. Besides this they built a few new churches, for "Brick Church" was too near Ladies Island to be within convenient reach of all the Islanders. But their church forms they changed very little except to make the praise house leaders subject to the Negro preachers of their churches whereas during antebellum days they had been subject to the white ministers.

[24] See Reid, *After the War*, p. 106n.